



# COLOURS IN THE RAINBOW:

Ecology, Socialism and Ireland

by JOHN GOODWILLIE

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# INTRODUCTION

Green politics - the politics of political ecology - are a recent arrival on the scene. Red politics - the politics of socialism - have been around for a much longer time. This pamphlet is about the relationship between the two.

St. Augustine said that any reason was good enough for coming to God. The term "rainbow politics" is sometimes used - for example by a Group in the European Parliament and by the Rev. Jesse Jackson - to describe coalitions drawing their inspiration from differing ideas or social movements. Some socialists, for example Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, argue that a radical politics has to be deliberately constructed to link together the traditional socialism based on an anti-capitalist movement with newer movements such as feminism, environmentalism and pacifism. I argue that socialists must go beyond this and re-examine a lot of traditional assumptions, re-building their ideas on an ecological base. As a person who has been active in socialist movements I have tried in this pamphlet to explain how this can be done. But equally greens must consider the social implications of their ideas and see the necessity of incorporating much of the socialist heritage.

Nature has produced innumerable variety: millions of species, millions of variations within the human species. Ecologists welcome this immense richness and want to preserve it. "There are so many colours in the rainbow," says the creative, not-yet-crushed little boy in Harry Chapin's song, "and I see every one."

## THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

The worsening problems of the environment have been the starting-point for the modern ecological movement which seeks to protect and make secure the relationships among living things, and between them and the earth. In the last few years, the extent of the environmental crisis has been publicised widely. The degree to which it threatens the future of our industrial civilisation is less widely recognised.

Food is polluted with pesticides and chemicals. Rivers and lakes are polluted with slurry and fertilisers. The air is polluted with the emissions of motor vehicles and of factories and power stations: the Moneypoint power station is now proceeding to add to the damage.

The process becomes threatening where it starts to affect resources. The forests of Europe are a resource which is threatened by acid rain. The seas are a resource for the fisheries industry. The air is a resource necessary for life itself, and yet the depletion of the ozone layer by chlorofluorocarbons contained in aerosols and packaging threatens to cause increased cancer as well as decreased crop yields.

Another threat to the atmosphere is the "green-house effect" created by the production of carbon dioxide. This is forecast to raise the temperature of the atmosphere several degrees and cause climatic change.



Scientific development presents two possibilities of catastrophe, apart from the atomic bomb. One is the accidental release of artificial organisms with no natural enemies. The other is the unforeseen impact of changes which are deliberately made: organisms specially bred through biotechnology, or pesticides like D.D.T. which was more effective in killing natural predators than in killing pests because it gets more concentrated as it goes up the food chain. Another example is the spread of monoculture in which vast tracts are planted with one crop: predators which normally live interspersed with crops cannot survive, and pests flourish.

Resources are also threatened by the growth of the world economy. It has been estimated that the present inhabitants of the earth will consume, during their lifetimes, more natural resources than all their ancestors consumed for the past million years. The extraction of minerals will become more expensive as the most accessible deposits are exhausted.

Of course, science can find substitutes for most minerals in short supply. But it is not so easy to grow food without a supply of land. The World Conservation Strategy calculated in 1980: 'If current rates of land degradation continue, close to one third of the world's arable land . . . will be destroyed in the next 20 years.' An area the size of Ireland turns into desert every five months. And due to the population explosion, more land is needed to grow food, as scientific breakthroughs like the increased productivity of the "green revolution" cannot be afforded by most Third World peasants.

Of course, those who have studied the population problem believe that as living standards, health and education improve, the growth of population will slow off. But if living standards are to improve by means of the established methods of industrialisation, then the pressure on industry's raw materials will become even heavier. Can the earth support the achievement of First World industrial economies by Third World countries?

Again, the threat is accentuated by oppressive social systems. There is the destruction of the Amazonian rain-forest by peasants moving in from north-east Brazil, because the Brazilian government will not tackle the north-eastern landlords; the process does not increase arable resources as the new land is exhausted in ten years, being good only for trees. The Amazonian rain-forest is believed to provide a quarter of our oxygen. The Brandt Commission stated that 'deforestation at its present rate will halve the world's stock of wood by the year 2000.' An area larger than Ireland is deforested every year.

The process of exhaustion of reserves will not take effect in an even manner. Starvation will occur locally at first - it is already occurring in the Sahel. Wars will break out over arable land or minerals, and reinforce the general tendency towards war.

The environmental crisis produces many different phenomena. The more the soil is damaged, the less it produces - or the more it needs costly inputs. The more erosion, the more droughts, and the more droughts, the more famines. The more trees are

destroyed, the more shortages of firewood- with further impoverishment, degradation of women, and diverting of time away from productive work. The more 'development' of reservoirs and irrigation canals, the greater the growth of water-borne diseases like schistosomiasis. The sheer cumulation of these phenomena will prevent the world economy continuing on its present course of gradual improvement in the industrialised countries and gradual deterioration in the Third World.

## ENVIRONMENTALISM

Responses to the environmental crisis take different forms. The term 'environmentalism' is sometimes used critically for those who have a reformist response: that reforms are necessary within the existing society in order to accommodate it to ecological problems. But the struggle to save the environment is of necessity a struggle for reforms. Organisations such as An Taisce, Greenpeace and Earthwatch put forward specific demands, specific objectives. Their support has to encompass both those who believe that major changes in the economic and political system are not necessary, and those who believe that they are.

Because reformist environmentalists do not accept that it is a whole system that has failed, they treat the symptoms rather than the cause; and by not examining the system as a whole they cannot even deal with all of the symptoms. But this is something which emerges with the growth of the movement. Environmentalists create the space within which the subject can begin to be discussed. This is not just because they may be more respectable and more capable of achieving the attention of politicians and the media. It is also because the existence of environmental campaigns - their activity, their successes and their failures - creates an awareness of the intractable nature of the crisis and the necessity of looking for more radical solutions.

One such solution is that which combines ecological concerns with traditional socialist ones - and we will return to this 'ecosocialism'. Others again look for a solution which involves state control over pollution and over resources, with the subordination of individual capitalist wills to a general interest. Since individuals refuse to think of the interests of others, processes founded on individual rights such as democracy and personal freedom have to be subordinated to a planned process of conservation. The logic of this is that life will be 'a privilege reserved for the selected specimens of a new race of humans, adapted by chemical conditioning and genetic programming to survive in a new ecological niche, carved out and sustained by biological engineering' (Andre Gorz). This 'ecofascist' school of thought is subject to the difficulty of all authoritarian systems: who controls the controllers? It also contains within itself a contradiction: that is a power-system like those which have created the present crisis.



## THE INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM

Why is it necessary for a solution to go deeper than a surface environmentalism? The roots of the crisis are bound up with the whole industrial system. There is the in-built requirement for growth. There is the separation of production and consumption, whereby people make things they will never use and use things they have not made. There is a constant drive towards economies of scale, although the gains made in this way are really outweighed by social costs such as transport, urban housing, municipal services, ill-health, and the artificial control of demand to match supply. The system is wasteful, for example battery eggs cost six times more energy to produce than they give in food value; road transport is promoted in place of the more efficient rail transport. Those in charge of the manufacturing process have no responsibility towards the environment from which they get their resources and to which they discharge their waste.

A socialist framework does not necessarily change this. The experience of Eastern Europe shows that pollution is a major problem even where centralised planning should be able to prevent it. Nor is it simply a question of the lack of workers' control in Eastern Europe. Where workers have a certain amount of control, in Yugoslavia, the situation is little better. The workers who work in one particular factory are inevitably concerned with making a living for themselves. They are certainly concerned with their own health, and may therefore act against internal health risks. They may even be concerned about the pollution of the local community by smoke or other gases. But there is nothing in the internal logic of workers' control to force them to concern themselves with the interests of people fifty miles down the river, or people hundreds of miles away where acid rain descends from the upper atmosphere.

Is the industrial system even going to be transformed in a socialist direction? Does the struggle between employers and workers embody a process whereby the workers gradually become more conscious of their real interests and decide to take over? Where has this process actually happened? The classic example - Russia, 1917 - happened in a very backward country with a young working class and a collapsing social structure. There have been other attempts: Germany 1919, Italy 1920, Spain 1936, Hungary 1956, France 1968, Portugal 1975, Poland 1981. But are these really the cat's-paws foreshadowing the storm? Is there a logic of history by which a few more heaves will make revolts happen simultaneously and with success?

The conflict between employers and workers has at its core the struggle over wages. In the nineteenth century, when wages were comparatively low and profit levels comparatively high, it was easy to see the wages struggle as an attempt by the workers to bite into profits. But nowadays, wage rises lead rather to improvements in productivity, with on occasions rationalisation and redundancies. Pressure on profits is continual; but wage rises do not lead to the progressive impoverishment of the capitalists. Employers and unions are locked into a symbiotic relationship where

each depends on the other. The industrial system needs a constant incentive to improve productivity, as the forces of competition are often distorted or act only in a long-term way. If you look at the way in which, after the death of Franco, Spanish capitalism managed to welcome the revival of free trade unions in place of the sterility of a decaying fascism, you can see how little of a threat to capitalism the wages struggle is.

What does the wages struggle give workers? Higher pay with which to buy the commodities other workers are making. Economies depend more and more on creating new needs and promoting them in order to soak up purchasing power. The improvement of products requires retooling and to make this economic, markets have to be expanded. As each new luxury becomes generalised, a new one appears. We are in a circular process. 'Much of our time is spent working to buy time saving gadgets to do time consuming jobs we do not have time for because much of our time is spent working to buy time saving gadgets...' Wage demands become not so much demands for increased consumption but demands for acknowledgment of status, of the value of the worker's being. And at the end of it, there are just as many inequalities and just as little satisfaction.

For the employers cannot create for their workers a healthy environment, a decent home, a living community, a meaningful relation to their work. And the workers have no option but to take the attitude: if we must work in mind-destroying and body-destroying jobs, if we must live in soulless housing developments, if we must spend a large part of the day commuting between the two, if the natural world is something to be consumed only at weekends or on holidays, if we must deprive ourselves of any opportunity to build a life under our own control, then we will extract as much financial compensation as we can.

In other words, there is nothing in the wages struggle which leads us out of the mess. The wages struggle is part of the problem, not part of the solution. With this perspective, it is not just the capitalist system of ownership, but the industrial system itself which is the problem. This industrial system does not just produce immediate ecological problems. It fosters militarism. Daniel Cohn-Bendit has said that if half the population of Germany had their own little house with an oil central-heating tank in their cellar, they could be persuaded, in the event of an oil crisis, that a task force should be sent to the Persian Gulf. The drive towards growth is closely linked with the armaments industry. Edward Thompson describes the society based on the production of the means of war as 'exterminism'. Economic growth has made the arms race possible. The arms industry in the West has brought profits; in the East it has reinforced the concentration on heavy industry and the need for economic competition with the West.

Both East and West, it has reinforced bureaucratic influence over industry. The industrial system, by building up ever bigger economic units, has more and more a bureaucratic structure of its own. Our whole lives are made up of dealings with



bureaucracies: the employer, the tax office, the social welfare system, the housing authority, the hire purchase company. Gorz writes: 'The great secret of large-scale industry, as of any vast bureaucratic or military machine, is that *nobody holds power*. In the modern state, the bearers of power enforce obedience in the name of objective necessities for which no one can be held responsible . . . It's no longer people who have power, it's the positions of power which have their people.'

The institutions, then, are places of authority where rationality is hidden and yet worshipped. Every decision must be rational because it has emerged from the bureaucratic machine. The science of administration, like all sciences, must come up with the right answer. But we know since Hiroshima that science does not always provide the right answers. The belief in a scientific method stands accused. Ecology teaches that "everything is connected to everything else". Thus the traditional scientific method which has enjoyed such great success over the last two centuries through isolating and dealing with small problems apart from their real world environment, is coming under considerable attack' (Colin Stoneman).

Many people have doubts about the feminist contribution to the movement for disarmament: it seems to go counter to the gains of the women's movement to insist that women must fight the bomb because it is they who bring up children. But the feminist movement has also contributed intuition and holistic thinking as counter-parts to male traditions of science and analysis. The feminist insistence that emotion and empathy are necessary and valid, the feminist appeal to intuition and sisterhood, are a necessary counterbalance to male assertiveness and rationality, and we need not concern ourselves here as to whether they are biologically feminine phenomena or only the result of ten thousand years of patriarchy.



## CAPITALIST CRISIS

The industrial system grows only with difficulty. Recessions come and go, and high growth rates are a thing of the past in most industrialised countries. Far from producing a surplus which could lift the Third World out of its increasing immiseration, the industrialised countries are growing at the expense of the Third World, by importing their products at low prices and receiving vast payments on the massive debts incurred.

There are tendencies within the industrial system which hold growth back. Further industrial development requires massive social costs, which do not fall to be met by the capitalist concern itself. There is the rising cost of law and order in a society which increasingly breeds alienation and despair. There is the cost of education, and of training which is increasingly borne by the government. There is the mechanisation of agriculture, which must supply food with a shrinking labour-force. There is the cost of maintaining the workers whose health has been broken by modern industry.

The environmental crisis produces a need for greater capital intensity. Gorz writes: 'Increasingly, and most notably in the Rhine Valley, the human crowding and the air and water pollution are reaching the point where industry, in order to grow or even continue operating, is required to filter its fumes and effluents. That is, industry must now reproduce the conditions and resources which were previously considered part of nature and therefore free . . . Either the rate of profit declines or the price of the product increases . . . It will be as if the cost of pollution control had been deducted from the income available to individuals for the purchase of consumer goods. The production of these goods will consequently tend to stagnate or fall off; tendencies towards recession or depression will be accentuated. And this diminution of growth and of production which, in another system, might be considered a positive thing (fewer cars, less noise, more air to breathe, shorter working days, and so on) will instead have entirely negative effects: the polluting goods will become luxury items, inaccessible to the majority but still available to the privileged; inequality will intensify, the poor will become relatively poorer and the rich richer.'

The shortage of land means higher land prices or expensive building of skyscrapers: urban sprawl or urban congestion. In the United States, forest products in the 1950's cost 2 1/2 times what they had cost in the 1870's, after adjusting for inflation. Despite over-capacity in industry and despite declining rates of profit, investment remains at a high level. Capitalist development is based on synthetic products which require more capital and more energy to produce the same quantity as before.



## LABOUR FORCE IN CRISIS

Not merely is capital in crisis, but also its labour force. This can be seen in the way in which internal structures in industry have to be changed in order for industry to survive. We see the introduction by management of features such as job rotation, job enlargement (increasing the variety of tasks which a worker performs), and job enrichment (increasing initiative and decision-making). Such measures are a response to workers' attitudes - not conscious attitudes formed in the trade-union movement, but unconscious attitudes deriving from the soul-destroying nature of factory work. The industrial system produces a rapid rate of change which decreases people's control over their own surroundings. It devalues people by making their skills obsolete. One result is that British workers over 50 die sooner today than in the 1950's.

The breakdown of the factory production-process is paralleled by the breakdown of the nuclear family as the unit for reproducing the worker. Marriages prove unable to withstand the pressures of change and the consumption-gearred lifestyle. Family units consisting of a worker, his wife, and children cease to be typical. Housewives are consigned to a lonely existence in housing estates where they are a long distance from friends and relatives, with nothing in common with their neighbours except that each has a husband who departs every morning for the real world miles away. The ties of the extended family are replaced by money ties to child-minders and reliance on over-stretched social services.

The nuclear family is not a natural institution. Prior to the introduction of agriculture people lived in bands of 30 to 50 people, not necessarily related, who shared much of their economic and social life; parents and children who had not reached adulthood were a unit only for eating and sleeping. After the invention of agriculture there arose the patriarchal family, in which all the descendants of a common ancestor lived under his authority. Capitalism needed the smaller, more flexible nuclear family. But the cost in terms of the alienation of children, the instability of family life, and the inability to care for the aged is becoming increasingly heavy.

## SOCIALIST CRISIS

The labour force is in crisis, but as we have seen the wages struggle seems unlikely to bring matters to a head. Socialists have placed their hopes on the industrial system producing a working class which would look towards a socialist solution. Yet, despite the growth of Irish industry and the economic crisis, Irish socialism is as weak as ever, and none of the parties of the left seem likely to achieve a breakthrough.

If there is a political deadlock facing Irish socialism, it is not simply a matter of Irish exceptionalism: Ireland failing to fall in line with the more modern political structures existing elsewhere in Western Europe. The socialist inspiration in Western Europe generally has ground to a halt. The socialist parties have no vision



of what a socialist society would look like - even in terms of a series of reforms which would answer their objections to the present system. Managing capitalism is all they think about. Nationalisations are seen as simply a strengthening of the existing national economy. Efficiency is the keynote. The idea of collective ownership of the means of production seems irrelevant to practical politics.

The Communist parties have fared no better. Some have adopted Eurocommunism, taking a path which the social democratic parties took before them into reformism and respectability, delivering up a pliant section of the trade union movement while centralised party discipline still lasts. Others, recoiling from this prospect, slowly ossify and exercise a strange sort of conservative influence among politically active workers.

The revolutionary left are stuck in the small niche they built themselves after 1968. The small parties which extended themselves beyond the confines of Trotskyism and Maoism compete within a socialist ghetto for votes which are already votes of the left, as the Socialist Labour Party did in Ireland. This process does not alter the left/right balance in the country.

## THE RISE OF THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

However, the increasing irrelevance of the orthodox political parties is balanced by the rise of new social movements. The feminist movement has shown up the complacency of male-dominated socialist movements, but it has had a wider influence in areas untouched by socialist ideas. The men's movement has echoed some feminist insights, recognising that men have oppressed themselves by adopting a hard, macho image.

Limited progress towards equality of opportunity has been made in many countries. The radical feminist critique has argued that the contradiction between the sexes is the most fundamental division in society. The authoritarian limits placed on sexuality by church and state in matters such as contraception, abortion, illegitimacy, and marital violence have become subjects for mass campaigns. The gay movement has likewise placed a question mark over the authoritarianism of state, family and society, and has brought forward ideas of sexuality and love on a basis of equality.

The violence which is implicit in authoritarian structures has also been a concern of the peace movement. The struggle for nuclear disarmament has mobilised millions of people not only into visible demonstrations on the streets and in the countryside, but has also produced a flowering of self-expression beyond the bounds of organised structures. It has given confidence to people who regarded themselves as incapable of influencing anything. It has exposed the conspiratorial silence of those in power and the lunacy of dominant ideas in the defence, state and scientific establishments.

The campaigns against nuclear power which erupted in the late 1970's helped to promote the environmental and ecology movements as well as the peace movement.

Environmental agitation has given new life to local community groups: a new feeling of the need and the ability to act without waiting for formal political authorisation. Community politics (or urban politics, as it is called on the Continent) has acquired a life of its own. In some countries squatters' movements have come into existence. 'Alternative' projects have provided a means of forming new ways of living by withdrawing partially from the existing system. A new distrust of bureaucracy has questioned the 'bigger and better' trend of industrial and political life. This tendency has linked up with the re-awakening of regional feeling and of the lesser nationalities of Europe.

In so far as the political scene is *not* bleak, it is because of the infusion of people and ideas from the new social movements into political life. One has only to look at the influence of feminist and anti-clerical movements in Italy; the impact of the peace movement in Germany, in the British Labour Party and in the Dutch Christian Democrats; the environmental attitudes of all the German parties under the influence of the Greens; the devolution of power to the regions in Italy, Spain and Belgium.

The revival of a national struggle in Ireland pre-dated most of these phenomena, but in so far as it has grown from a determination by the oppressed to do something for themselves, it reflects the same pattern. The self-activity of the civil rights movement in the North flowed over into the self-defence of the Catholic ghettos. The Republican movement has mobilised young people alienated not only by the excesses of the State forces, but also by the modern urban environment, in Dublin as well as Belfast. The lack of structures at a local level is met by the organisation of alternative structures, as has been seen in the opposition to drug-dealers. However, the Republicans' support for violent means of struggle cuts them off from many people who are also struggling to assert their identity and to change oppressive and life-threatening structures.

## **TOWARDS A MORE BROAD-BASED SOCIALISM?**

The social democratic parties and the Eurocommunists are more open to influence from the new social movements than the more Stalinist Communist Parties. However, it is necessary to ask whether the traditional concepts of socialism allow for the simple adding in of these new ideas. Is one saying, for example, that feminism has to be simply added to the socialist programme? If it is a sort of optional extra - very desirable, but still optional - it does not alter the male chauvinist nature of the socialist movement. If socialists see new movements and decide to support them in the hope of convincing their adherents that their aims will only be achieved under socialism, this is really a demand for the incorporation of everything under a socialist banner.

The Socialist Labour Party in Ireland had a specific policy of looking towards trade unions, the women's movement, the national question as future sources of support. It was not simply the weaknesses of the S.L.P. that brought this to nothing. Those who were active in these fields outside the Party felt themselves as primarily



engaged in something other than socialism. They had no incentive to enter the socialist ghetto.

The book *Beyond the Fragments*, by Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, argued that the socialist movement must learn from feminism. Hilary Wainwright wrote: 'We are now faced with creating a socialist organisation not primarily through debates, struggles and splits within existing parties (although that will be an important part of the process especially in relation to the Labour Party), but through the coming together of socialists based in the various "sectoral" movements, the majority of whom are not members of any political party.' This is largely a call for a socialist movement transformed by the insights of feminism. But Sheila Rowbotham wrote in the same book; 'The campaign for a woman's right to choose freely whether to have an abortion or to have a child raises immediately control over her own fertility and maternity which leads to the more general issues of man's sexual hold over woman, of human beings' relationship to their bodies and the importance of sexual pleasure.' In other words, she is saying, this goes beyond a simple equal rights policy which can be taken to be part of socialism. Can the concept of socialism be indefinitely expanded in this way, or have we got to think of broader concepts going beyond socialism?

### SEEK YE FIRST THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC?

Can we have a sort of stages theory in which the first stage is the achievement by socialists - or by the working class - of state power, and the second stage consists of dealing with women's, peace, and environmental issues?

There are two problems with this approach. One is that the means (the first stage) are unrelated to the end: nothing is to actually be *done* except organise the working class. The other is that time does not stand still. Environmental problems are getting worse. Nuclear weapons have proliferated. On a sheer basis of probability, nuclear war by accident will occur sometime, and as long as the Bomb is in existence, that time must be getting closer. And the working class is as far taking power as ever.

Socialist ideas were formulated in the context of a newly-industrialised, poverty-stricken working class who had nothing to lose except their chains. The process of exploitation was much clearer than it is today, when capitalists are faceless bureaucrats and investment managers, and workers have got consumer goods and mortgages to lose. I am not arguing that the workers have been bought off. I am arguing that their way of life does not lead, of its own accord, to political consciousness. I am arguing that the wages struggle leads to higher wages and not to the abolition of the wages system. Lenin's answer to this problem was the injection of socialist consciousness into the working class. But the injection has been going on for a century, and it hasn't taken.

Can we dare to assume that the proletariat is about to rise to its historical responsibilities? There are, logically, three possibilities within the traditional Marxist framework:



- (1) The conditions for the socialist revolution have existed for the best part of a century; only the betrayals of the socialist movement have prevented the working class becoming conscious of the role it must and can play.
- (2) The conditions for the socialist revolution do not exist now, and will not exist for some time yet; in this case the conditions for the revolution are likely to be superseded by disaster: what Marx called the "mutual ruin of the contending classes."
- (3) The conditions for the socialist revolution have only just arrived or are just about to arrive; one last heave by socialists will get the whole revolutionary process to click into place and avert disaster in the nick of time.

If (1) is right, we spend our time exposing the treachery of the working class leaders. If (2) is right, there is nothing we can do. Do we hope, like previous generations, that (3) is right, or do we begin to question the traditional Marxist framework?

## AN ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

If Marxism cannot offer an explanation for the whole situation, is it possible to put together a synthesis to integrate together the various themes of opposition to capitalism, to industrialism, to exterminism, to bureaucracy, to patriarchy? The links between ecology, nonviolence, and feminism appear in discussing the concepts themselves, and in actual movements on the ground where ideas are cross-fertilised and individual people get involved in overlapping movements (like those of feminists for disarmament). Is it possible for these ideas to be linked to what has traditionally been considered as socialism through the concept of ecosocialism?

If ecosocialism is to be understood as the addition of ecological ideas to the socialist programme, then the structure becomes top-heavy. It is not just that the new ideas question socialist concepts such as the elimination of poverty through economic growth - levelling upwards. It is that far more is being considered than a change of ownership: it is that which is owned which is under consideration. The Marxist explanation of change in social systems is that a contradiction arises between the forces of production - under capitalism the factories, machinery, labour, and methods of operation - and the relations of production - under capitalism the relations between employer and worker. The forces of production have become social, Marx argued, while the appropriation of the product remains a private affair for the capitalist. This contradiction produces an immanent socialist revolution. (Marx thought it was imminent also.)

The Marxist contradiction is obviously still there. But the theory assumes the indefinite continuance of the industrial system of which forces of production and relations of production are part. The raw materials come in from a place external to the system, by-products such as pollution go out to a place external to the system, and they do not enter into the argument.

But the continuance of the system is now threatened by ecological breakdown. So we are faced with a broader contradiction: that between the industrial system (both forces and relations of production) and what Rudolf Bahro calls 'the natural conditions of human existence' (minerals, air, water, climate, fertility, and human resources). The contradiction between the system and the natural conditions does not mean that there is no longer a contradiction between forces and relations of production: it simply means that this contradiction is overshadowed. The principal problem of politics becomes: can the principal contradiction (between system and natural conditions) be brought to a head in the short term through the consciousness of people and under the control of people, or must the world passively await the eventual disaster which the contradiction must bring about in the long term if left to itself?

## GREEN POLICIES

What are the main features of an ecological or green politics which would bring the contradiction to a head? The aim must be an economic system which is sustainable and self-renewing. The only input that is free is solar energy; everything else diminishes the earth's resources. In principle, therefore, all waste products and all commodities after use should be recycled, and all raw materials should be obtained from recycling.

The nature of the product has also to be considered. Socialists have long talked about production for need, not for profit. Political ecology requires production for need because anything else is wasteful of resources. Consumer goods have to be made to last. Design has to pay less attention to selling points and more to raw materials and conservation of energy. The need to reduce pollution may make things more expensive, as can be seen in recent disputes over lead in petrol and sulphur dioxide from power stations like Moneypoint. Efficiency as an economic criterion will therefore have less of a role.

A system which is to be sustainable indefinitely must call into question the way in which the industrial system is based on constant growth. The concept of zero growth seems at first sight to mean the freezing of existing patterns and the perpetuation of existing inequalities. This reveals how well the socialist idea has been infiltrated by the concept 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. Socialists have thought in terms of a levelling upwards and, for this, growth is necessary.

It is not possible to extend to everyone the material goods now possessed by the elite. It is not even possible always to distribute them more equitably. Gorz remarks: 'How can one equitably distribute supersonic air travel, Mercedes Benzes, pent-house apartments with private swimming pools, or the thousands of new products, scarce by definition, which industry floods the market with each year in order to devalue older models and reproduce inequality and social hierarchy? And how can one "distribute equitably" university degrees, supervisory jobs, managerial roles, or



tenured positions?' The only answer is to find ways whereby we can all live without many of these things: to enrich our lives, but not only in a material way.

Zero growth requires redistribution of wealth. However, the level of poverty in the world is such that redistribution of wealth on a world scale seems to mean simply the sharing of poverty. Can we modify the concept of zero growth in the direction of equalisation upwards? Can we say: zero growth in West Germany, moderate growth in Ireland, rapid growth in India?

This presents a problem. The average American uses twenty times as much energy as the average Asian. If the world population is stabilised at 11 or 12 billion - and it looks as if anything substantially less can be achieved only through famine or nuclear war - to raise this population even to British living standards would require twelve times the present level of industrial production. There is no way in which the world can provide the resources for everybody to live at the level of the most industrialised countries.

What we have to do is to look at the ways of measuring wealth. If a person spends part of their working day sitting in a traffic jam, national income goes up. If manufacturers make cars that fall apart after a few years, people buy cars more often and national income goes up. If cars crash and people have to go to hospital, national income goes up. If the victims have to get artificial limbs, national income goes up. If the lead in the cars' exhaust causes hyperactivity among children so that they engage in vandalism and more gardai have to go employed, national income goes up.

In other words, national income statistics are not a satisfactory method of measuring real prosperity. It must be possible to work out an economic system which allows a higher level of satisfaction, enjoyment, happiness, without a higher arithmetical level of income. Gorz points out that consumption in affluent societies now 'requires an increasing quantity of products to provide the same level of need-satisfaction'. Thus we have seen tin cans replaced by aluminium ones, which require fifteen times as much energy to produce; rail transport replaced by road transport, which consumes six to seven times as much energy, and uses vehicles which must be replaced more often; the disappearance of objects assembled with bolts and screws in favour of welded or molded ones, which are thus impossible to repair; the reduction of the durability of stoves and refrigerators to around six or seven years; the replacement of natural fibers and leather with synthetic materials which wear out faster; the extension of disposable packaging, which wastes as much energy as non-returnable glass; the introduction of throwaway tissues and dishes; the widespread construction of skyscrapers of glass and aluminium, which consume as much energy for cooling and ventilation in the summer as for heating in the winter; and so on.'

Alan Roberts points out that all this additional production has prevented a reduction of working hours: 'The evidence suggests that something like half of the (non-military) production in the United States today satisfies "needs" which did not exist in 1946, a time when basic needs were already pitched at a level far exceeding the expectations of the majority of humanity today.'



In relation to economic development, green politics has to offer a way forward which is alternative to the industrial method of economic growth. In the Third World, development does not have to be based on importing modern machinery (such a useful market for First World manufacturers!). Much machinery that has been imported spends most of its time out of order because of climatic differences, inexperience of the operators, or unavailability of spare parts. Instead, appropriate technology needs to be devised which can fit into the predominantly rural environment, be operated by the people there, and allow them to stay there rather than migrating to the shanty-towns; tools must be locally-made and be cheap enough to be provided in large numbers, they should produce from local raw materials and for local markets.

Such methods enable the Third World to reduce its dependence on the First (and Second). They make possible a path of development that is less industrial, less obsessed with size, and therefore less dependent on multi-nationals and their agents, the local bourgeoisie. And they require the mobilisation of local people independently of the city-based elites, making possible a politics of alliance with the urban working class to replace the politics of subservience to middlemen and hence to the urban elite.

Such a course of development provides an alternative to the draining of Third World resources for First World consumption, either in the form of raw materials or in the form of finished or half-finished manufactured goods. Applied to agriculture, it enables these countries to feed themselves without depending on imports of fertilisers and over-specialised seed stocks. Equally vital for this purpose is that the land should not be devoted to growing crops for consumption in the industrialised countries (by animals or people). The answer is not for the industrialised countries to take their products at a 'fair' price, but for a change in the social structures in the Third World by which decision-making power will be taken into the hands of the people who need the food and not held by landlords who are looking for the largest profit possible.

A sustainable society has to achieve a sustainable relationship with the natural world. 'We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.' This aim is often expressed as a need for harmony with the natural world. But "harmony" should not imply a complete absence of conflict. The ecosystem is normally self-regulating, adjusting itself through a myriad of little conflicts. And the conflicts do not normally result in the destruction of the environment on which a species depends. Instead, they are dialectical: they end not in total victory but in a synthesis which permits life to continue on a new basis and contains within itself the seeds of a new struggle.

It is necessary to ensure that humanity's inevitable conflicts of interest with animals and plants do not end in total victory, and therefore in total defeat. So it is necessary to abandon the received ideas of man having dominion over the earth, being master of nature, breaking open the virgin soil, and similar rapist sentiments.

It is necessary to see human beings as part of nature and dependent on it for the continuation of life. We should learn from the hunter-gatherer peoples who say prayers to the spirits of the animals they are about to hunt, explaining that they are needed for food and praying that they will allow themselves to be caught. The Mayas said similar prayers to the earth before they started to till a patch of ground.

In the same way as the lion's attack on the antelope is justified by its need for food, so all our interferences with nature have to be justified by our necessities. We have no need for furs and skins from wild animals, for the overwhelming majority of experiments on animals, for chasing animals for sport, for packing animals for slaughter live in ships. In our blundering way, we are apt to produce side-effects that we do not intend or do not care about, as with pesticides and natural predators. The point is made in *Basic Ecology* by Ralph and Mildred Buchsbaum: 'When information is incomplete, changes should stay close to the natural processes which have in their favour the indisputable evidence of having supported life for a very long time.' We have to preserve the great variety of nature, whose wealth we do not fully understand.

Pesticides have to be gradually eliminated: wherever it is possible, employing a natural predator to protect crops rather than a pesticide; wherever it is possible, fertilising the land by the use of waste products and rotation of crops; wherever it is possible, rearing animals in an approximation of their natural conditions, rather than tranquillised and stuffed with antibiotics in slatted cubicles. The yields of organic farming are only 5 to 10 per cent lower than conventional yields. In fact, factory farming depends on the import of crops and fish-meal from the Third World: food that is needed there. We need, indeed, a massive shift from animal food to plant food, since a field can feed ten times as many people directly as by having animals graze on it.

The more we rely on natural methods, the less pesticide residues we will eat and the less our animal food will be damaged by the physical and psychological stresses of captivity. And this harmony with nature as a whole helps us also to establish harmony with our own natures. We have been conditioned by millions of years of evolution to live our lives by the changing patterns of the seasons, to take exercise as part of the search for food; and when autumn means simply the adjustment of the central heating and exercise means a timetabled slot in the day's activities, we are not at peace with our own natures.

We also have to establish permanently sustainable relationships between human beings. As hunter-gatherers our ancestors lived peacefully together, and if a quarrel emerged the party which was weaker would move off to live in another part of the forest. We have not come to terms psychologically with the agricultural revolution which forced people to defend their fields, produced the macho insistence on being top of the heap, and enabled a few to institute government as a means of settling quarrels.



Part of the unnatural way we live is our alienation as workers from our work. Alienation is an integral part of the modern industrial system. There can be several responses to it. Firstly, the actual techniques within the workplace can be modified. Ivan Illich, in his book *Tools for Conviviality*, argues that machines should be in general limited to those that assist the worker's own creativity, as opposed to turning the worker into a slave of the machine. We need a programme for the reduction of workers' alienation from work, through an attack on piecework, an attack on shiftwork, an attack on meaningless work, an attack on unnecessary dividing-up of work, the protection of health and safety. To the extent that these things are not possible, it will be necessary to reduce to a minimum this sector of alienated work.

Secondly, workers must have power over their own lives. In other words, workers' self-management is necessary. This requires not just an elected leadership, but a dismantling of distinctions between different types of worker: for example, the abolition of the distinction between manual and intellectual work.

Thirdly, we have to think in terms of the greater integration of society. It is necessary to consider the alienation that is caused, outside the workplace, by the modern urban environment, and to act against 'concrete jungles' and town planning geared only to the motorcar. We have to oppose the rigid distinctions between town and country in terms of living conditions, working conditions, and the type of productive activity which is permissible.

The idea of self-sufficiency is part of this. It is not so much a question of holding on to national wealth or cutting ourselves off from foreign influences, as the advocates of autarchy used to argue. Nor does it have to mean self-sufficiency for the nuclear family - that can be a way of reinforcing oppression. It is more a question of making economic structures comprehensible, and therefore controllable; of bringing production and consumption together; of overcoming the divorce which capitalism made between producer and consumer in order to force ordinary people into the market for goods as consumers and on to the labour market as workers; of saying that trade is useful only for moving goods into places which cannot produce them except at great expense, and that the transport costs involved in trade represent the using up of energy to no great benefit.

The ecological perspective points to the industrial system based on growth as the cause of the degradation of the earth and the alienation of human beings. It is the concentration of power which has permitted this. The answer therefore involves an orientation away from centralisation, away from bureaucracy, away from authority. There arises a feeling for the idea of community, whether this be the old geographical community which has succumbed to industrialism, or the newly-established community founded deliberately on ideas of sharing and co-operation. We are only at the beginning of setting ourselves the problem: how can we limit the powers of government, rather than how can we - our class - our party - become the government?

Democracy is not just a question of counting up votes on a wide scale. An article by Michael Barratt Brown and Stephen Bodington suggests that we should 'live in



small self-managing communities which we know and understand intimately and so are able to influence in their conduct and use of knowledge.' Bahro makes the point that 'anarchism, self-management and so on are absurd if you are dealing with corporations that serve a world market, have branches in seventeen countries and contain ten separate levels of management.' To relate this back to the environment, E. F. Schumacher quotes the view of Leopold Kohr, to the effect that 'small-scale operations, no matter how numerous, are always less likely to be harmful to the natural environment than large-scale ones, simply because their individual force is small in relation to the recuperative forces of nature.' Only by bringing institutions down to a comprehensible scale can responsibility be achieved over what they are doing.

These concepts are associated with Schumacher's phrase 'Small is beautiful', which was derived pragmatically from the way in which large corporations have divided their operations up into individual firms. Schumacher writes: 'We need methods and equipment which are

- cheap enough so that they are accessible to virtually everyone;
- suitable for small-scale application; and
- compatible with man's need for creativity.

Out of these three characteristics is born non-violence and a relationship of man to nature which guarantees permanence.'

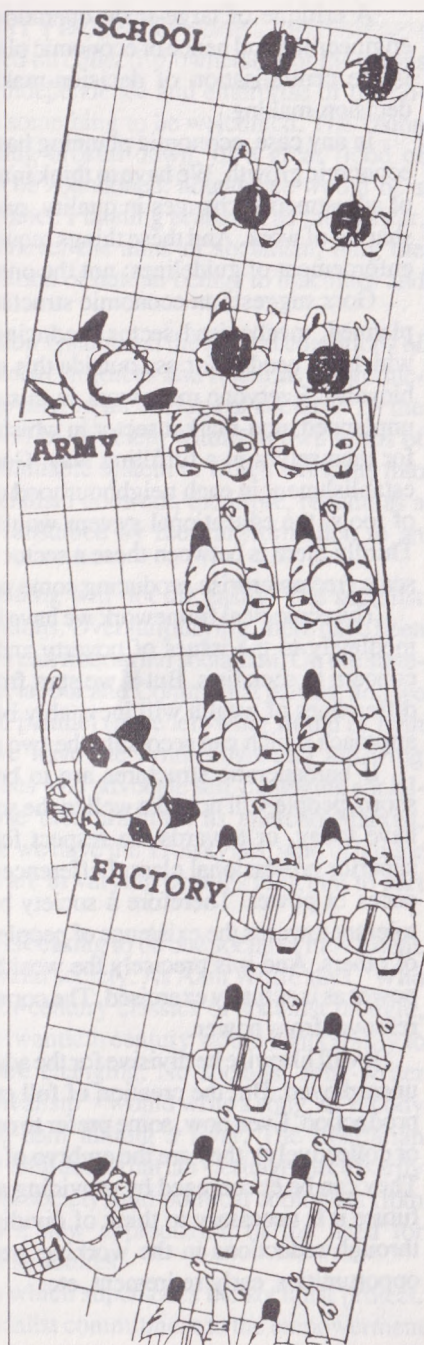
Greens' concern with size reflects some of the same concerns as the 'new right'. Obviously there is the danger of reflecting the right's unconcern with issues like poverty. But the fact that the right is mobilising distrust of big government should awaken socialists to the fact that the socialist project is often conceived by people as 'nationalise everything' and not as a project of human emancipation. Fear of big government arises from people's real experience of bureaucracy and not just as a desire of the petty bourgeoisie to prevent themselves being dispossessed.

Violence is fundamentally authoritarian, and so is sexism - and heterosexism. The green movement is capable of developing opposition to big government in a feminist direction by extending the struggle against bureaucracy into a struggle against all forms of authoritarianism. The government and the church have to be forced to withdraw from interfering in people's private lives.

Some advocates of political ecology have thought in terms of the reversion of women to their 'natural' role. However, there is nothing 'natural' about this supposed role. What is perceived as the natural role of women is the role they fulfilled in the traditional society, early capitalist or even feudal. This was the system of production which produced industrialism. Petra Kelly quotes an English feminist as saying: 'We don't want an ecological society where men build windmills and women silently listen, bake bread and weave rugs.' It would be preferable to look back to the only sustainable and ungoverned society that we have known: the hunter-gatherer society in which women's role, while different to men's, was not a role of subordination as it has been in the agricultural and industrial societies since then.

This anti-authoritarian emphasis does bear with it a contradiction, however. Who is to enforce all the new safeguards against pollution which are necessary? Who is to stop people raiding the earth's valuable resources? Many old economic structures will survive for a long time. Many problems will have to be tackled at a high level. The problem of acid rain clearly has to be tackled at a European level. If the River Shannon is being polluted, this requires an Irish government to tackle it: no provincial or regional government would have responsibility for the whole river.

The ecofascists place all the emphasis on this, and say: strengthen the state. The anarchists on the other hand say: the job can be done by changing the type of social organisation where production is carried out. It is difficult to imagine that this will be sufficient. Governments will still be necessary at national and even European level, but their powers must be circumscribed as much as possible by having power delegated up to them from a lower level, rather than descending down from them. 'Nothing should be done at a higher level that can be done at a lower' (Jonathan Porritt). The imposition of solutions from a national power-structure is a sort of implicit violence. While communities may need to be prevented from harming others, they need to become responsible for their own decisions through systems of local self-government. In the case of Northern Ireland, it is much more important to work out ways in which people can live together than to determine whether it should be part of an Irish or British unit of a European framework, or a unit in its own right.





A critique of large-scale operations involves a distrust of attempts at social engineering, and hence of economic planning. The problem with economic planning is the centralisation of decision-making, not just the undemocratic manner of decision-making.

In any case, economic planning has been conceived largely as a mechanism for economic growth. We have to think much less in terms of growth, and more in terms of adjustments, changes in quality, orientation towards environmental protection, sharing of work. And these things require the setting of limits and incentives and the enforcement of guidelines; not the one-off decisions of the command economy.

Gorz suggests an economic structure divided into three sectors. He proposes a planned, mechanised sector producing a few necessities of life, and also things which are needed for use outside this sector like telephones, microprocessors, and bicycles. Everyone must work in this sector for part of their life. There is also an unplanned, non-market sector in which people would produce non-essential things for themselves in a fulfilling way. Gorz proposes that this would be done by the establishment in each neighbourhood of community workshops with a free supply of tools: the educational system would give people the ability to use these tools. Thirdly there is between these a sector of co-operative or locally-controlled small-scale free enterprise producing some necessities and some optional goods.

The ecological framework we have been discussing does not make reference immediately to the issues of poverty and social justice which have always been of concern to socialists. But if we start from the premise that a society based on large differences of wealth will inevitably be a disharmonious society, we may have an approach which can reconcile the two positions.

If bureaucratic structures are to be demolished and authoritarianism held in scorn, people will not take well to the sort of employer/worker relationships that we have today, or towards the respect for lawyers, doctors, teachers that creates a superior professional class. Differences of wealth also necessarily produce differences of power. Therefore a society built on democratic co-operation cannot be tolerant towards the existence of people with sufficient wealth to determine the fate of others. And it is precisely the wealthy who in the present society exercise such power as is actually exercised. The correction of the present structures requires their removal from power.

It will likewise be divisive for the adult population to be divided into workers and unemployed. But the creation of full employment cannot be on the basis of extra production. Even now, some prefer to opt out or to employ themselves (individually or collectively): they are the embryo of a new world where life is united with work. They can be encouraged by providing a minimum income to every citizen. For the future it is necessary to think of dividing a finite amount of work more equitably through reductions in the working week, increased holidays, wider educational opportunities, early retirement, etc.



## WHAT BECOMES OF THE SOCIALIST PROJECT?

Clearly, an ecological society is not based on collective ownership of the means of production, the old socialist goal. The independence and enterprise of the co-operative and the self-employed becomes something to be welcomed. The vision of fetters on the forces of production being broken down, of a great flood of abundance coming into being - this has to be abandoned: abundance would be a disaster on a finite and heavily populated planet. Planning ceases to be the answer. But economic growth and planning were never the aims of socialism, only the means. The aim of abolishing the subordination of human beings to machines and social forces remains.

If the contradiction between the production system and the natural conditions of existence now overlays the contradiction between forces and relations of production, will the latter contradiction re-emerge later in an ecological society? To the extent that it does, the ecological society will be deficient within its own terms of reference: it will be failing to achieve a sustainable system in which work fits into its environment. The transformation to socialism does not, therefore, remain as a task for a future generation: it has been subsumed by the transformation to an ecological society.

But the ideas of centralisation and planning will not die easily. The socialist movement has always had divergent inspirations. Oversimplifying, there have been two currents: state socialism, and what I will call libertarian socialism. On the state-socialist side we have the social democratic, labour and Communist parties; and we have the Blanquists, the closest Continental parallel to the left-wing strand of Irish Republicanism. On the libertarian side we have the syndicalists and left-wing anarchists; we have the small left-wing parties who advocate self-managing socialism; we have various groups who analyse their tradition as anarcho-Marxist, spontaneist, or new left. Near the borderline we have the Trotskyists, who originate in a libertarian opposition to Stalinism but are in varying degrees reluctant to part company with centralising ideas.

The point has been reached where there is ceasing to be one socialist movement. The state socialists will remain tied to industrial society. As Alan Wolfe says, 'Who could imagine, reading the great nineteenth-century classics of socialist thought, that the main selling point of the idea in the twentieth century would be its ability to organize economic growth?' But things are changing. No socialist song-writer nowadays - apart from one tied to 'socialist realism' - would write a song, as Woody Guthrie did, in praise of a hydro-electric dam taming a river. The libertarian socialists are coming to realise that their anti-authoritarian heritage necessarily requires an orientation away from industrial society; and political ecologists from differing political origins are coming to a new appreciation of the need for community solidarity and non-hierarchical structures.

What is needed, then is a green project which supersedes the socialist project. Such a project takes over the libertarian socialist commitment to the empowerment

of ordinary people. It also provides a firmer base for the integration of other issues. It is not just capitalism which has produced an aggressive, war-orientated society with sexual oppression. Socialists can be macho as well. A society founded on the principle of living within nature, within the ecosphere, with mutual respect for all forms of life, is necessarily committed to mutual respect for other human beings - to tolerance rather than supremacy. By recognising that the structure of industrial society promotes authoritarianism, greens are able to work out a holistic approach which rejects war and sexual oppression along with capitalism. A challenge to patriarchy is a challenge to authoritarianism in general. As Petra Kelly says, 'The same machismo that breeds war also encourages rape, pornography and the battering of women. There can be no peace while one race dominates another or one people, one nation, one sex despises another.'

### THE MEANS OF TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

I want to turn now to the framework of the transformation of society: the problem of the State. It is possible to transform society by achieving control of the state? This problem has tended to be posed by socialists as a problem of reform or revolution. To the reformists the state is neutral and it is a question of winning a majority in the electoral process: revolutionaries on the other hand believe that the electoral process will be put to an end if there is a danger of a genuinely socialist majority being elected. It is possible to take the view that a mass popular movement outside parliament is the most important thing, and that in countries where bourgeois democracy is well established, it would not be possible for the Establishment to overturn a parliamentary majority which was backed by a mass movement. (The example quoted against this line of argument, that of Chile, ignores the fact that Allende never had a parliamentary majority.)

However, if a major problem is bureaucracy and a major part of the programme is to dismantle much of the State, can the mechanisms of the State itself be used to accomplish this? Irrespective of the wishes of the civil servants or generals, the whole dead weight of the State machinery will tend to subvert the project. And if the new, decentralised institutions are to be established by the State, they will be handicapped by being the creatures of central power. They will fail to exert themselves sufficiently, and they will tend to exert themselves irresponsibly, basing themselves on the old assumptions that they will be over-ruled if they act against long-term interests for the sake of temporary popularity.

Part of the answer to this is that new institutions must as far as possible be based on the upsurges of the mass movement. We have to envisage movements that may seize power in local areas as part of an emerging electoral majority, and which would therefore be overstepping the bounds of legality - though not the bounds of democracy.

But it is also necessary to recognise that the attempt to change society simply by changing the State is a symptom of that centralisation which has caused so much of



our problems. We have to walk on four legs: firstly to build up the mass movements; secondly to use the State institutions; thirdly to take control at local level; and fourthly to take control over ourselves as people. The personal is political, as the feminist movement has taught us. A change in personal lifestyles is required. The germ of such a change is already visible. It can be seen in the deliberate adoption of healthier eating patterns and exercise patterns. It can be seen in the erosion of patriarchal attitudes in the home, both husband/wife and parent/child attitudes. It can be seen in self-help groups dealing with health problems or with social problems such as bereavement, single parenthood or attempted suicide.

It can be seen also in the partial recapturing of autonomy from the market, through do-it-yourself or through attempts to achieve self-sufficiency through homesteading. This process needs to be developed through the formation of communities of people trying to achieve a high degree of self-sufficiency and autonomy on a collective basis. Such communities could work out for themselves an ecological lifestyle. Their internal structure would of necessity be egalitarian. And they would be in a position to develop alternatives to the nuclear family by relieving isolation and accommodating those who do not belong at present.

These various alternatives make it possible for us to envisage the development of an autonomous sector of the economy existing parallel to the capitalist/bureaucratic sector. Such a sector might be largely co-operative in form, inter-connected by information networks rather than by middlemen, and producing food and manufactured goods wanted for their quality. Of course, it could not be hermetically sealed off: it would be subject to constant erosion, in the same way as health foods spread from health-food shops into supermarkets. But an autonomous sector could be substantial. Such a sector would make people less reliant on the State. Perhaps to some extent it lets the State off the hook as far as the provision of employment is concerned. This is to be welcomed. It reduces the power of the State.

The existence of such an autonomous sector would be not just a prophetic witness for the future but an organising centre for the future. Capitalism arose within the feudal system in just such a way. Marxists have always argued that the working class could not build up its power within capitalism in such a way, because worker-controlled firms would be subject to cut-throat competition from capitalist rivals trying to put them out of business, and could not raise capital when it became necessary to compete at a higher level of capital intensity. But if a co-operative sector was producing goods for a market with different motivations, if it was using soft energy and human-compatible technology, it would not be so vulnerable.

Part of the answer to the problem of capturing the State, therefore, is to reduce the all-importance of the State: to surround the State with mass movements and with an autonomous economic sector, as Mao's peasant army surrounded the cities to bring about the Chinese Revolution. Bahro writes: 'I see no need to destroy the institutional structure, and I want to get away from the terminology of violence. I think of the process as one of dissolution, passive from the point of view of the



subject of this dissolution. We don't go in and disband something; we allow it to disintegrate by withdrawing our energy from the system as such.'

This alternative way of organising pre-figures the society of the future. The mass movements, the personal relationships of those who are trying to live a different sort of life, must demonstrate a refusal to imitate the power structures, the aggression and the dehumanisation of the present system. It is therefore necessary to work out strategies for organising which are essentially non-violent; to give non-violence deep and enduring roots so that it becomes the natural method of organising in the society of the future.

## **THE ORGANISATIONS FOR TRANSFORMING SOCIETY**

If the centralised State is to be outflanked in the manner described, then it becomes an advantage for the movements of opposition to operate in a decentralised manner, autonomous one from another. It is necessary to abandon both the Leninist and social democratic assumptions about the central role of 'the party'.

The Leninist concept of democratic centralism was a method of overthrowing a semi-feudal, autocratic regime in Russia. In reproducing within itself the centralism of the regime it was opposing, it laid much of the groundwork for the creation of Stalin's totalitarian regime after the Revolution ran into difficulties.

What can be the functions of a political party? It brings people into contact with each other. It educates its members and spreads the gospel. It offers participation to sympathisers through having its candidates stand in elections. It acts as an information network, allowing members to judge the weak points of the oppressor and the areas of strength of the oppressed. It offers leadership to the emerging movements, advising them where to strike.

The movement for change needs all these roles. But in a pluralistic system, as long there is a large amount of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, there is no reason why they need all be performed by a single body under a single direction; or why such a single leadership has to function out of sight of the membership or even consist of a stable group of people. If elections are being contested, there has to be a body to do this - call it a party. But it should only be one component of a broad network. It is dangerous for it to assume that it is the central one.

## **THE AGENTS OF CHANGE**

I come now to the question of what social forces are to bring about the transformation of society. Socialist thought has ascribed this role to the working class. The Marxist theory states that the working class becomes increasingly united. Craft and geographical divisions become less important. As workers become increasingly gathered together in large factories, and struggle side by side against their capitalist employer, they become ready to awaken to a consciousness of their class position and of their ability to change society.

However, this type of industrialism has never come to Ireland. In 1902 39% of Russian workers were in factories of over 1000 workers. In 1981, the equivalent figure for Britain was 37%. The equivalent figure for the Republic is not published, but if the ratio of factories of 500 workers to factories of 1000 workers is the same as in Britain, it would be 15%. In fact, I would be surprised if it was half that.

Most of the modern industry in Ireland is in the form of subsidiaries of multi-nationals. These are frequently just a small part of a scattered production process: a partly-processed raw material is shipped in, some assembly work is done here, and a half-finished product is shipped out to some other country. How can the workers in such a plant come to a realisation of their ability to take over the system? It is meaningless to talk about nationalisation when it is obvious that the multi-national would still control the supplies, it would still control the market, and the government would be left with useless machines and an idle work-force. The fate would be identical if it was the workers themselves who seized control of the factory.

This situation is somewhat analogous to that of homeworkers. The problem with homeworkers has always been that they work isolated from each other: their only links are with the merchant who brings them their raw material and takes their product; therefore they are very difficult to organise. In a similar way, each subsidiary is an isolated unit (as far as the workers are concerned), and it is impossible for the workers to achieve a common solidarity or a shared understanding of the entire production process, so that the vision of a socialised enterprise cannot become apparent to them.

Another effect of small size is that trade unions are not very integrated into the factory. Since there are not enough workers to support a full-time convenor or trade union official, there is a dichotomy between the shop stewards and union apparatus. The union, as an apparatus, is external to the factory and easily ignored by the rank and file. The result of this is a clientelist relationship between worker and union, rather than a feeling of being organised for a purpose of social change.

Can we envisage that a process of further industrialisation, geared to a pattern of more integrated enterprises, can produce in the future a working class which will resemble to a greater extent the type of working class which will achieve a socialist consciousness? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at the more advanced capitalist countries. As has been pointed out, there are question-marks nowadays over the size of enterprises. Large companies have to divide themselves into divisions or subsidiary companies and put in internal profit motives in order to operate efficiently. Nowhere do white-collar workers by and large think of themselves as working-class. They may join trade unions, but the union is often seen as a service which looks after the maintenance of their status. But white-collar workers are an increasingly large proportion of the workforce and are now beginning to outnumber manual workers. Even manual workers often come to think of themselves as middle-class. The introduction both of highly-educated technicians and of de-skilled machine-minders opens up new divisions among workers. There is a shift



from manufacturing into service industries, where workers often work in small units. Alvin Toffler in his book *The Third Wave* suggests that the electronic revolution is producing new possibilities of working from home; there is less emphasis on buildings and machines; there is a de-massing of society and a renewed emphasis on the individual. How are the workers, less and less a mass, less and less identifying themselves as working-class, more and more peripheral to what has always been regarded as the core of the working class, the centre of socialist hopes - heavy manufacturing industry - how are they going to achieve socialist consciousness?

In Ireland we are already starting to experience these phenomena of advanced capitalism. Trotsky described this process as the "uneven and combined development of capitalism": that is, those whose industrial development starts late do not reproduce every phase of the industrial revolution: the drive for maximum productivity and the competition of the world market dictate that Irish capitalism uses some of the most up-to-date processes alongside more backward ones. We cannot, therefore, anticipate reproducing the immense factories and the concentration on heavy industry that others have seen.

If we are going to miss out on an old-style industrial revolution, we are also going to miss out on an old-style industrial working class. A working class based on small units is a working class which cannot centralise its experience of exploitation or of struggle. Workers will still take action, but on a decentralised basis.

If you ask yourself who looks like starting the move towards an ecologically-based society, you find that the class composition of social activism tends to be based on white-collar workers, technicians, skilled workers. In France, a commentator has written: 'The ecologist electorate is young, urban . . . the working class is under-represented in it, in contrast to the cadres of intellectuals, finally . . . it is rather orientated towards the non-communist left, but weak at least in Paris in the traditional places of implantation of the left.' The Italian Radical Party is said to have its highest support among the urban upper middle class and white-collar workers in the service sector. The West German Greens have high support among those with a secondary education, and female members of the upper middle class.

It seems to me that if we think in terms of a multi-faceted social movement made up of people who are working for change in their personal lives, in their relationship to the market, in their neighbourhood, in their relationship to the State, as well as in their working lives, we do not have to look solely to their working lives to define who can be part of the progressive movement. The upper layers of the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy will be hostile. White-collar workers are more progressive not because they are workers but because they do not have interests tied up with the maintenance of the industrial system, they find their air and water polluted, they do not have power over their own lives. If we draw a dividing-line within the overwhelming majority of the population, it is not so much a class line as a sectoral division: those engaged in manufacturing industry, whether as managers or workers, are perhaps more committed to the industrial system and therefore less of a force for change.



Bahro has a concept of 'surplus consciousness' as 'the decisive material force.' He argues that never before in history has such a large proportion of the population - extending far beyond anything that can be considered as a ruling class - had so much time free 'for the development of the forces of both head and heart.' This surplus consciousness is 'an energetic mental capacity that is no longer absorbed by the immediate necessities and dangers of human existence and can thus orient itself to more distant problems.' Thus these people, tend to be better educated than the average, have ideas which are not determined by their economic position. They are free to consider the general interests of humanity.

This concept at first appears to be what Marxists call voluntarism, the belief that sheer willpower is enough to achieve the historic breakthrough. But let us examine this. The objections to voluntarism are that is idealist and substitutionist. Now what Bahro is talking about is not idealism (in the philosophical sense of the word). The idealist would say that ecological ideas are eternally valid, they have been waiting to be discovered since time began, and it is a great pity that somebody didn't think of them a thousand years ago or ten thousand years ago and spare the world a lot of unnecessary suffering. While some political ecologists might say this, the ecological movement as a whole is a product of a real material crisis. Bahro's surplus consciousness is something that emerges specifically from the modern mode of production in which there is surplus time. It is also something which is demanded by the modern mode of production: it is not ahead of its time, in the way that it is sometimes argued that Mao and Castro were ahead of their time in attempting to produce a proletarian revolution in a peasant country.

Nor is Bahro's concept substitutionist. He is not trying to substitute the dedication of an elite for the building of a mass movement. He is not saying that an elite will free the masses for their own good. He is saying that surplus consciousness is so widely spread that a mass movement can be built right there. Is not this in accordance with Marx's statement 'nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come'?

Bahro regards social consciousness as 'the embodiment of society's subjective productive force, and therefore as a completely material and economic reality.' He can claim to be still a historical materialist because he is talking about the way change occurs in history in the context of material circumstances, although obviously he has gone outside the context of economic determination where it is simply the conflict between classes that is the cause of change and the harbinger of the future.

He sees the future as being created by a popular front or 'historic compromise' 'between all forces concerned for the preservation and qualitatively higher development of our own civilisation and world civilisation in general.' To him the essence of the historic compromise proposed in Italy was a link between the socialist movement and the Catholic workers who voted for the Christian Democrats. His popular front, therefore, is not a front like those of the 1930's when the workers gained nothing from keeping the 'progressive bourgeoisie' in power. He is talking

not of capitalists who want to save the present system, but of capitalists who want change.

He talks of building links with people who criticise capitalism from a reactionary or romantic position, like the utopian socialists of the early nineteenth century. He also talks of a link with Christians who derive progressive ideas from their beliefs. In the light of his approach it is possible to see how movements of religious inspiration can form a social force in alliance with other movements for change. The ideas of liberation theology have become familiar through Third World solidarity movements and are beginning to be applied to problems of poverty in Ireland. The more ecologically-orientated movement called creation centred spirituality has also made an appearance.

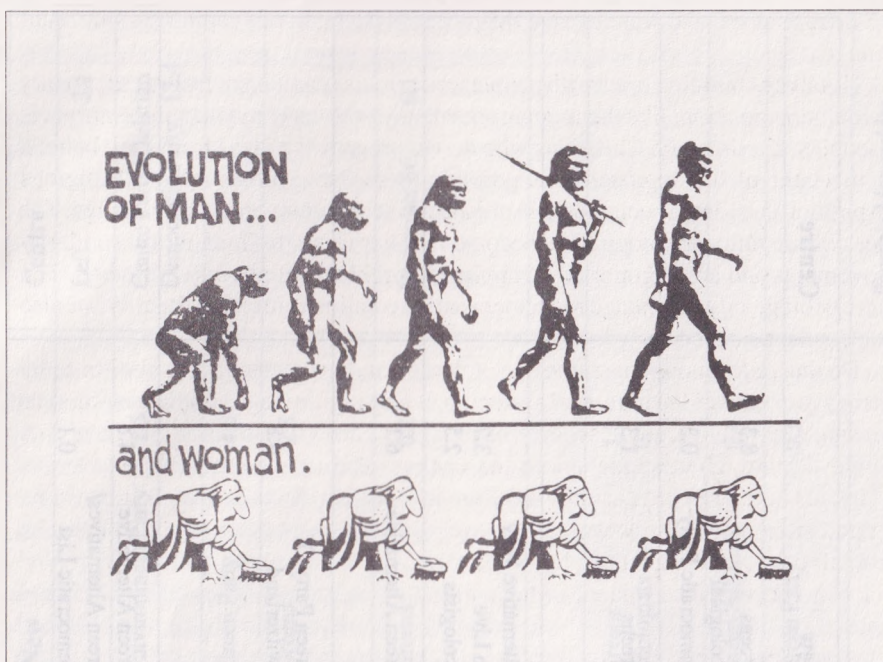
Do the trade unions constitute one of the social movements for change? In so far as they form part of the industrial system, securing higher wages so that workers can consume more but enjoy less, they have no relevance to the tasks that lie ahead. However, through the trade unions the workers also have an important defensive weapon. Unions can protect individual workers against victimisation, they can resist redundancies which throw workers on to the scrap-heap, they can protect the health and safety of workers on the job. Moreover, this action of protecting workers takes place in a decentralised manner which militates against reliance on an all-powerful state.

An innovative role can also be played from within the trade unions. They can find ways of reducing alienation by expanding workers' control over their workplace in ways such as the internal organisation of the workplace and control over hiring and firing. They can find ways of altering the product to conform more to ecological principles, for example through alternative workers' plans.

Such areas of activity increase the role of the unions' local representatives at shop-steward and committee level, and leave the union bureaucracies participating in the ruling institutions and performing a holding role in relation to wages and social welfare. Left-wing socialists have always wanted to capture the leadership of the trade unions. Even if this were possible, it would be irrelevant. The problem of bureaucratisation in the trade union is not that full-time officials stop their members from getting the maximum possible wage increases. It is unlikely that the National Wage Agreements held down the average level of pay, although they did alter its distribution. The problem is that bureaucratic domination reduces members' control over their own lives, over their workplaces, over their conditions of work, over their ability to struggle, and over their ability to think about change.

But the trade unions will not be the central focus of work for those who are trying to bring about radical social change. The forces for change will be more diffuse than a simple class-based movement. They will involve the participation of those who have the freedom to think out a course towards the changes which are necessary to bring the existing slide to a halt on the eve of destruction.





## GREEN PARTIES

The emerging ecological movements in Western Europe are in general closely linked with peace movements, and to a lesser extent feminist ideas have also become prominent. The best known ecological party is the West German Greens. The Green movement developed from various sources, in particular the 'citizens' initiatives' which agitated on planning issues, health, and education on a fairly respectable basis. There was a tradition of criticism of modernity, expressed in the Sponti protest movement. The ecological movement was built through protests at the proposed nuclear power stations at Wyhl, Brokdorf, and Kalkar, the airport extension at Frankfurt, and the proposed reprocessing plant at Gorleben. Alternative lifestyles were popularised here and in various other projects, estimated in 1980 as numbering 11,500. There were squatters' movements composed of dissatisfied or unemployed young people. The peace movement when it emerged was closely linked to the Greens.

But green parties have emerged throughout Western Europe. An article by Ferdinand Muller-Rommel gives attention not merely to the emerging new parties, but also to traditional centre parties which have devoted attention to environmental issues for a long time, and also to left-wing parties which have taken up environmental issues under the influence of the ecological movement. The table is based on his approach.



**TABLE: ENVIRONMENTAL PARTIES IN THE MOST RECENT ELECTIONS**

Country	Left	New	Centre
West Germany (1987)		Greens 8.3 Ecological Democratic Party 0.3	
Denmark (1987)	Socialist People's Party 14.6 Left Socialists 1.4	Greens 1.3	
Belgium (1985)		Alternative Way To Live 3.7 Ecologists 2.5	
Luxembourg (1984)		Green Alternative 6.1	
Switzerland (1987)	Progressive Organisations of Switzerland/Green Alternative 3.5	Green Party Of Switzerland 4.8	
Austria (1986)		Green Alternative 4.8 Green Alternatives/ Democratic List 0.1	

Country	Left	New	Centre
Norway (1985)	Socialist Left Party 5.4		Left 3.1
Sweden (1985)		Environment Party 1.5	Centre Party/Christian Democratic Party 12.4
Finland (1987)		Green Party 4.0	
Italy (1987)	Radical Party 2.6 Proletarian Democracy 1.7	Greens 2.5	
Netherlands	Political Party of Radicals 1.7 Pacifist Socialist Party 1.2	Greens 0.2	Democrats 66 6.1
Spain (1986)	United Left 4.6		
France (1986)	Alternative Unified Socialist Party 0.1 0.1	Greens Ecologists 1.0 0.1	
Ireland (1987)		Green Alliance 0.4	
United Kingdom (1987)		Green Party 0.3	
Portugal (1987)			People's Monarchist Party 0.4



The issues taken up by green parties are among the issues called 'post-materialist' by political scientists - environment, free speech, ideas, participation, importance of the person, self-expression, quality of life. The ecological crisis is going to constantly replenish the ranks of those motivated by these issues. And the green movement will not recruit simply on the basis of people's subjective ideas. Young people will join in, not just by a process of conversion, but because the activities of the new movements correspond to the alienation of youth from the political system: the more people opt out, the more they determine to live their own lives in defiance of the system, the more they are building the new society.

## THE IRISH SCENE

In the specific context of the Irish scene, one is dealing with a very under-developed environmental movement, due perhaps to the comparative lack of industrial development. But as has been argued, our society already possesses many of the features of the most advanced capitalism. And as ecological ideas are bred by the advanced system, they have appeared in Ireland quite independently of the fact that they are also brought from Britain and the Continent in books and on television, etc.

What does exist in Ireland are the social movements such as the peace movement and the feminist movement, which in Irish circumstances merges into an anti-clerical movement, as can be seen by mobilisations on issues such as contraception, abortion, and divorce. This feature brings to mind the Italian Radical Party, which has built itself very much on anti-clerical, civil rights, and feminist issues, and took up ecological demands long before the formation of a green party.

In Ireland, The Green Alliance is identified mainly with environmental issues. It has few organic connections with the social movements. It exists to too great an extent on the plane of its own abstractions, rather than seeing itself as the political consequence of a social upheaval extending more widely than itself. Having come into existence through an act of will, a virgin birth, it exists on the basis of individual commitment to a set of ideas. And with this idealist framework it can only respond to individual enthusiasms and wait for the ecological crisis to produce recruits on an individual basis.

This lack of analysis can be contrasted with the Marxist method as described by Bahro in *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*: 'The more he now penetrated into the political struggles and economic contradictions of bourgeois society, the clearer Marx came to recognise that there was no purpose in dreaming up the model of a new society, but that the proper point, as he and Engels jointly expressed it, was rather to discover and promote the real movement that abolishes the existing state of things.'

Because the Green Alliance has not grown out of the real movements but through individual conversions, there is an ever-present danger: the conversion of individuals in the Establishment or in existing parties becomes a possible way forward. Why

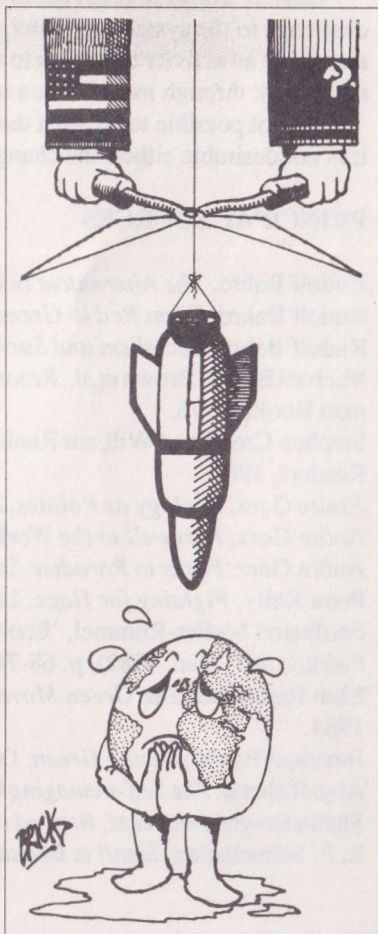
should real progress not be made through the existing systems? Why not let the existing systems reform themselves with a bit of external assistance?

Of course, individuals *will* be converted and some reforms *will* be carried out. But the strategy of greens towards the electoral system needs to be to put outsiders into the system: people who will remain outsiders and will not be swallowed up, people who see the other parties as sharing a commitment to the industrial system and themselves as the real opposition. There has been much tension in the German Greens between the 'Realos' who see participation in coalition as providing a way forward and the 'Fundis' who see the danger of being swallowed up. The point is not that coalition can never be a way of exploiting a temporary balance of power, nor that an existing party will never move on to a green road of development. The point is that a strategy which assumes that these things will happen ensures that greens *will* be swallowed up.

There are going to be some greens swallowed up by the system: individuals who sincerely think that they can do more for humanity by accepting a position of responsibility - or, look at it the other way, traitors who are being bought off. Each of these two viewpoints will be right some of the time; but whichever is right it will still be necessary to maintain or to rebuild a movement in fundamental opposition to the system.

To assume that the answer to the deficiencies of the Green Alliance lies simply in internal reform of the Green Alliance would be a centralist assumption: assuming that only a political party can take power, and that outside the party there is no salvation. The Green Alliance is the organisation which participates in the electoral sphere and has a role in propagating ideas and bringing together the experience of a wider green movement. It is not that movement, and if it manages to become the political expression of that movement it will be primarily because of what is happening in the movement outside the political sphere.

The social movements think themselves to be non-political and yet they are creating a new politics.





In campaigning on single issues against warmongering, against sexual authoritarianism, against the repression of civil liberties, against the destruction of the environment, a decentralised movement for social change is being created. Objectively, these forces are moving in the same direction. Many of their participants recognise this and welcome it. Others have not made the link-up in their minds. If such linkages can be made, people may realise the necessity of action in the political sphere as part - but only part - of a strategy for achieving the objectives of these movements.

There will be no central area of struggle. Ecological ideas provide a basis, I argue, for uniting people's ideas and for relating various movements to one another. But there is no general staff. Human beings as individuals have to accept responsibility for themselves and, knowing themselves, participate according to their own abilities and their own identities.

There is a need to build the mass social movements from which a generalised challenge to the system can emerge. And participation in such movements cannot merely be an activity tacked on to everyday life: the new society must permeate the movement through modification of attitudes and lifestyles here and now.

It is not possible to forecast the exact course towards human emancipation. But it is not desirable either: the change must be a free decision by those making it.

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